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Giorgio Armani's Staying Power

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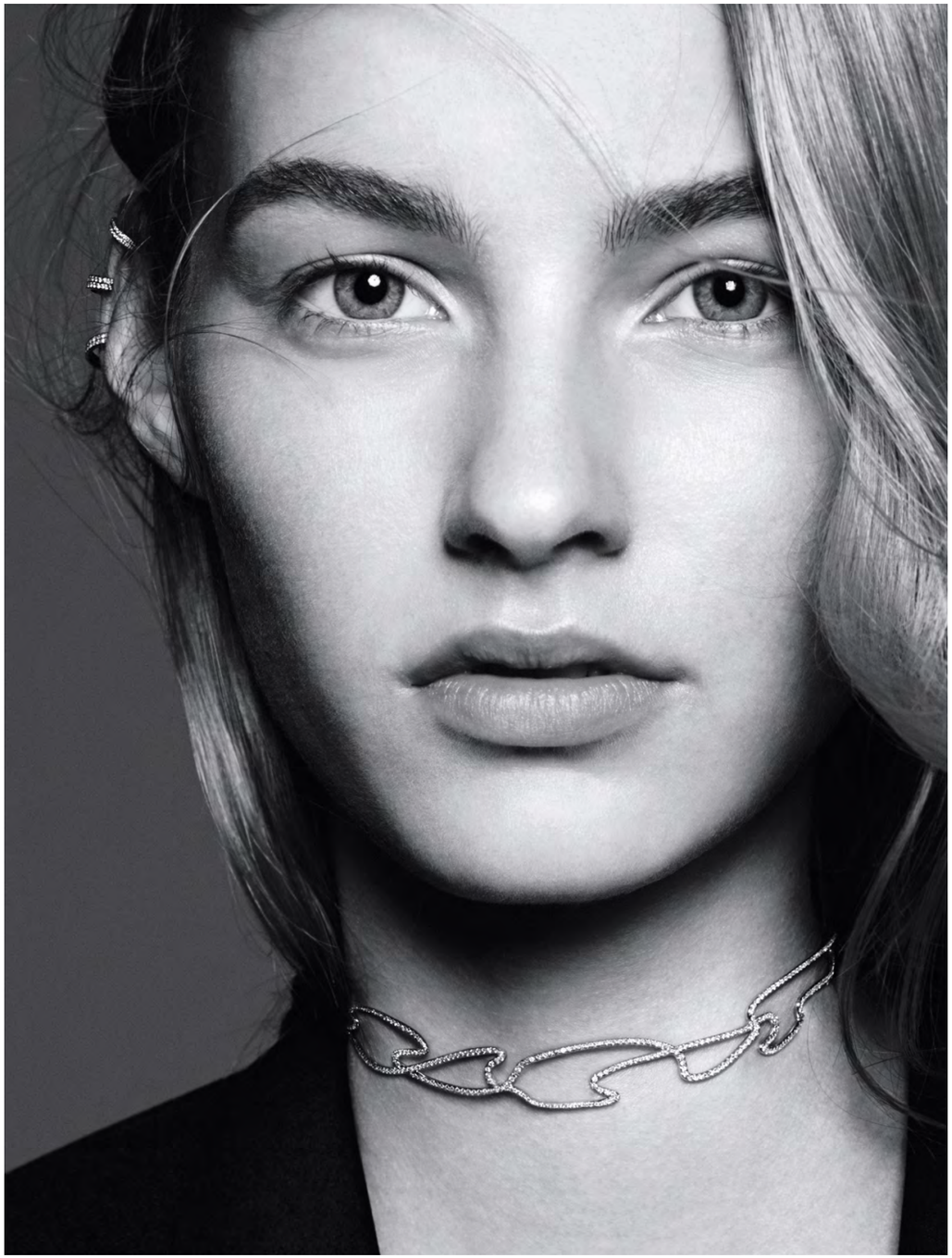

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Camille Bidault-Waddington is French with some English and Spanish. She describes herself as "a fashion midwife" as well as an art director, photographer and fashion editor. Camille doesn't have a favourite colour, but she really doesn't like yellowy-aniseed green.

Cathy Horyn is from Coshocton, Ohio. She is a journalist. Cathy's favourite colour is blue because it's calm, cool and cheerful.

David Owen is from 2c Billet Avenue, Suburbia where he grew up on Channel 4 and books. He runs IDEA with his partner Angela Hill where together they discover, sell and publish books. David used to have a Saab 900 that was metallic silver – this is his favourite colour and also his favourite car.

Dick Page is from the west of England, not far from Bristol. He is a make-up artist and the Artistic Director of Shiseido. Dick doesn't have a favourite colour but is drawn to colours like Venetian Rose or ashes of roses. He loves brown and grey-based pink shades but doesn't know why.

Hans Ulrich Obrist is from Zurich, Switzerland. He is the Co-Director of The Serpentine Galleries in London. Hans' favourite colour is red.

Hung Huang is very confused about where she is from. She wishes she was from Costa Rica but instead was born in China. She carries a US passport and lives in Beijing. She does a lot of things but none of them are what she wants to do – which is nothing. According to her fortune-teller, Huang's favourite colour should be blue.

Jerry Stafford is from Bromley, in the south of England. He is the Creative Director at Premiere Heure, and a journalist and fashion consultant. Jerry's favourite colours are the iridescent jewel tones produced by the microstructures of humming birds' feathers, which he finds both exotic and erotic.

Katy England is from Cheshire, England. She is a fashion stylist and consultant. Katy's favourite colour is green.

Mesh Chhibber is from London. He is the co-founder of Peau de Chagrin. Mesh's favourite colour is black because he finds it comforting.

Pieter Hugo is from Cape Town. He is an image merchant. Pieter's favourite colour is the white light of late-night television.

Willy Vanderperre has lived in Menen and Antwerp in Belgium, and would at some point like to live in Los Angeles. Willy's favourite colour is white – for him, it is all the colours combined.

Masthead

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Special Thanks to:
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Publisher
Tartan Publishing Ltd

System
Tartan Publishing Ltd, 29-31 Brewery Road,
London, N7 9QH, United Kingdom, +44 (0)20 7619 6617.

For subscriptions please visit
www.system-magazine.com

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Distribution by COMAG. Tavistock Works, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, UB7 7QX, UK, +44 (0)18 9543 3811.

Colour reproduction and print supervision by LBH labs.
Printed and bound by Grafica Nappa Srl
in Aversa, Italy.

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ISSN No.: 2052-0808

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SASHA PIVOVAROVA FOR ZADIG & VOLTAIRE - SS15 AD CAMPAIGN - ZADIGETVOLTAIRE.COM

Throughout the 1980s and '90s we saw the rise of 'indie'. Indie music, indie flicks, indie magazines, indie fashion. While the word was first associated with the UK's alternative music chart – for records released on independent as opposed to major record labels – of course, it gradually emerged as a broader badge of honour, loosely implying that independence was for artsy outsiders; and ultimately became a generic term employed to describe pretty much anything that wished to express more soulful values.

And along the way, indie hijacked independent.

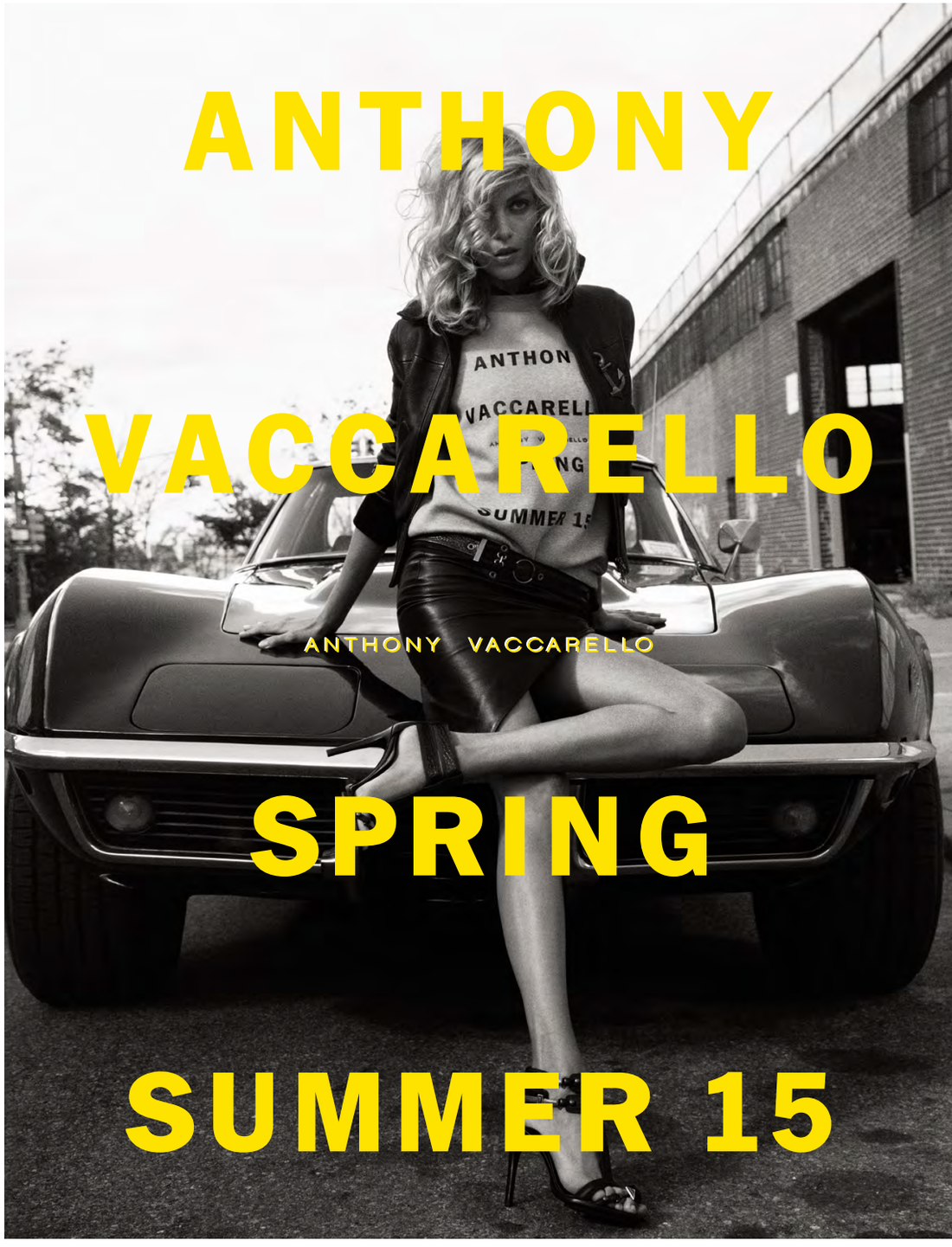
But why should independent mean small? Why does willfully reigning in one's ambitions mean you're more soulful? Surely independent means being self-sufficient, individualistic, headstrong… (we know it does because we've just looked it up in the dictionary).

There's certainly nothing indie about Giorgio Armani's independence. Our 80-year-old cover star epitomises the idea that independence can mean power. And when you sit down with Mr Armani (and get Juergen Teller to snoop around his personal residence) you soon understand that, besides the obvious trappings of owning his 40-year-old global empire outright, what fuels him is a stubborn refusal to dilute his ideas or be swayed by influence.

The same could be said for Cathy Horyn, probably fashion's most-feared – and respected – critic, and the subject of this issue's long-form interview. (It turns out that Cathy's father was himself a newspaper reporter, who made a living covering public executions in Ohio penitentiaries. Now we wouldn't want to presume there's a link, but…)

And then there's Hermès, the original independent luxury house. We took a look inside their 'colour kitchen', the psychedelic service that transforms their silk *carrés* into a global money-making machine (reportedly one sold every 25 seconds).

Indie never felt so big.



‘I had to take things into my own hands.’

There’s nothing ‘indie’ about Giorgio Armani’s independence.

By Giampietro Baudo
Photographs by Juergen Teller

Over the course of 40 years in an industry of change and reinvention, Giorgio Armani has marched to the steady beat of his own drum. Describing the essence of what he does as a search for "linear and ostentatious elegance" applied across an empire that spans ready-to-wear, couture, numerous diffusion and cosmetics lines, furniture, hotels and even food – it's an aesthetic fidelity that turns over €2 billion for the company each year. And crucially, it's a company that is neither publicly traded, nor part of an ever-expanding international luxury conglomerate – instead, Giorgio Armani S.p.A. remains entirely in the hands of the man whose name adorns its labels; a man with no formal business training, whose first foray into fashion, following a stint in the army in the early 1960s, was as a window dresser.

'When I know I'm visiting our ateliers the following day, I honestly can't sleep from excitement. I'm constantly getting up to check my alarm clock.'

It was in 1980 that the name Armani stamped itself on the world. Having dressed a young Richard Gere in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* – in which he designed a "jacket to be as fluid as a cardigan; elegant, but loose"; an unstructuring of the male uniform that changed both the way men and women across the world dressed – the big screen's global resonance gave rise to ensuing Armani-mania, from which the 80-year-old Italian icon has amassed an estimated personal fortune of €7.8 billion.

Creativity and commerce: both are under Giorgio Armani's control – but despite the self-proclaimed designer-businessman's decades of experience and success, he still has doubts the night before a show. It's an issue of "trust", he tells *System* from the comfort of his personal residence, just moments away from the company's headquarters situated on via Borgonuovo in the Brera district of Milan. This trust is formed between his brand and its audience, one that has been cultivated by the unwavering desire and discipline of its founder and CEO. In the following conversation, Mr Armani takes a rare moment to sit down and discuss risk and regrets, what will happen to the company beyond his lifetime, and those moments when it gets lonely at the top.

Mr Armani, after 40 years of work, are you happy today?
Yes, I have to say that I am just as happy today as when I began 40 years ago…

So how do you manage to cope with what must be an extraordinary workload? And how have you structured the company?
More than 9,500 people work for the group throughout the world. And obviously, the management of a business so extensive and complex requires complete and constant attention. So, my alarm clock goes off every day at seven a.m. and, after physical exercise and a healthy breakfast, I arrive at my office more or less at nine. I spend my day at the company's various headquarters and offices, giving equal attention to the management of the business as to its creative elements — I think of myself as a 'designer-businessman'. Between the seasonal fashion shows in Milan and Paris, and the numerous other events connected with the fashion house, the weeks pass by pretty quickly as I constantly follow this schedule.

Do you ever take time off?
I only allow myself short holidays in August and December – to recuperate.

Do you still enjoy the punishing work rate you've given yourself, after so many years?
All I can say is this: when I know I have a work appointment the following day — to visit one of our workshops or ateliers — I honestly can't sleep the night before. I'm constantly getting up to check my alarm clock. And when it finally goes off in the morning, I'm happy. I just love being in contact with the people who are actually working to make the clothes; I enjoy the manual nature of the work and being able to spend time in the workshop. Even today, after 40 years, my enjoyment is like that of a child.

Was creating a company like the one you have now a childhood ambition? What do you think triggered the desire to do this?
Absolutely not, the idea came much later. I was a timid child, not at all outgoing. Part of that was down to the dominating presence of my brother, a person with great charisma and extraordinary beauty; and I certainly felt a bit of a latent rivalry between us… As I grew up I didn't know what my career would be for years and years; perhaps I wasn't fully aware of what was going on around me. [*Thinks out loud*] What did I want to be as a child? I didn't think of becoming a designer… No, I mainly wanted to become a doctor, but perhaps also a writer or traveller. I love this world and the idea of being able to go out and explore it certainly appealed

to me – even though that's never been enough for me.

How have you managed to create and oversee such a successful fashion company — and maintain that for 40 year, despite having no formal business training whatsoever?
I can only talk for myself, but I'd have to say that learning on the job is often more effective than what any traditional training can offer you. I learnt about business day-by-day – while it was happening. So just going to work every day was my training college; and I'm so lucky to have had it like that.

Did you have a specific business model in mind when you started your career?
I have always had a strong, burning desire to realise my full potential – fashion only came into the picture once I'd abandoned the idea of becoming a doctor. I immediately understood that this was the field in which I'd be able to fully express my vision. Once I'd realised that, everything happened in a natural sequence of events. I have no formula to pass on to others because I didn't follow a formula myself, nor was I inspired by any other existing business model. I've always done everything my own way and continue to do so with a stubbornness that means even now I keep hold of my independence – it's the most precious thing of all. If I had to describe my career using just a few words, I would say passion, risk, tenacity and consistency.

Am I right in saying that it's this risk and tenacity that's prevented you from giving in to the temptations of outside investment?
The decision to keep complete control of my business – of my independence – for me was, and is, both quite natural and quite necessary. I am a designer-businessman, and my vision of the business is integral to my way of working in the design sector. I must admit that maintaining my independence is not easy today, and I am constantly courted with ever-increasing insistence. Staying independent requires a tremendous amount of effort, as I find myself having to deal on a daily basis with competitors who are true titans of the business world. The temptation to give in is always there, but then I think I'd end up losing control — and that I'd no longer be able to create anything how I really want it — and so I resist.

'I have no formula to pass on to others because I didn't follow a formula myself. I've done everything my own way and stubbornly continue to do so.'

Do you still have dreams, or regrets, after 40 years of your business?
I look to the future in different ways now. 40 years is a long time to be in the fashion world — a long, long time — especially the way I have lived them. I'm still always thinking of the future; maybe it's a future on the decline as opposed to a healthy future, but that's the way life goes. And it's a life that's dealt me a great hand. I feel today like I did ten, even 30 years ago: confronting the same issues I've always had about establishing my brand across the world, and I still experience the same doubts the night before a fashion show that I've always had. But the excitement never leaves; right now I'm excited by the great Expo2015[1] event in Milan, and by the opening of my museum – they're no different from the challenges I was experiencing on the very first day of the company, and I'm working like a maniac to ensure their success.

You mentioned consistency before. What's been the one constant in the 40 years of your company?
If I look back, I have to say that there has only ever been one consistent thread running through my life: I've never let even the smallest detail pass by without checking it. I've never ever said, 'Who cares?' even if it was only something that appeared to be insignificant.

Let's talk about how you took the Armani brand to the world. What motivated you, and how did you manage this?
The expansion of my business, across all the different areas, has been driven by my desire to produce not just fashion, but an all-encompassing Armani style. I wanted my aesthetic vision to be applied not only to clothing, but to many other contexts. From a business perspective, this made it possible to establish diverse profit flows, all stemming from the value and identity of the Armani brand, and that would never have been achieved had we operated in clothing alone.

But was there a specific moment, or event, which lit the fuse for the brand to expand internationally?
I think it was the decision to contribute to creating the costumes for *American Gigolo*. It seemed a perfectly natural move for me at the time, because I'd always had an interest and passion for cinema. It was a decision motivated not by business strategy – even though

it translated into a phenomenal success – but through the immaterial world of cinema. And it was thanks to cinema that my style entered the public consciousness and captured people's imagination. I could never have imagined that costumes in a film would have led to the growth of my business, but that's just how it worked out.

It led to Armani becoming a universal style reference – everyone in the world soon knew what the Armani aesthetic was all about. How have you managed to stay true to the codes and values of your house over the years, as the business has evolved?
By staying on a consistent path, dictated by a never-ending search for new yet harmonious lines, innovative materials, sophistication and quality. My idea of style and taste is no different from when I started out; I've always sought to express a deep appreciation for all that is simple and linear. Times have obviously changed since 1975: men and women have gradually freed themselves from the protocols and rigid attitudes of the past, and found different ways to express their own personalities. I've always wanted to keep up with the times, but without distorting the essential characteristics of my philosophy and aesthetics.

But wouldn't you like to write a new chapter of your aesthetics today, one completely different from that of the past?
Yes, I'd be really happy to: sometimes I think about changing, and about revolutionising my style. If I were to do this with a collection, 10 percent of customers will praise that change to the skies, while the other 90 percent are confused. It's the 90 percent that terrify me, and I feel the whole responsibility of estranging such a large number of people who are so important for the stability of my Group – those customers who want something from us which, at first glance, is immediately recognisable as Armani. When I travel, I look around at what my colleagues in the fashion industry are doing and I see the most beautiful things; things that make me realise that the world has changed and is continuing to change. I'm not talking about those designers who are simply puppets in thrall to a particular kind of trendiness, but those designers who have a healthy alter-ego, capable of making the sums add up; so that it's then possible to convert a beautiful object into something successful.

On precisely that point, many successful fashion brands have been the fruit of two people working in a great creative and business synergy: such as Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli, Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, Tom Ford and Domenico De Sole – yet you are in command on your own…
I don't consider the artistic component to be in conflict with the business component. I define myself as a designer-businessman, and my vision of the business is integral to my way of working with fashion. When we started the business there *was* a divided model: Armani on the creative side, Sergio Galeotti[2] on the business side. Sergio's early death forced me to revaluate everything. I realised immediately that in order to grow the business as I wanted, I had to maintain my independence — and to achieve that, I had to take things into my own hands, including from an economic perspective. It was a natural development, albeit a highly demanding one.

Does it ever feel lonely at the top?
A bit, yes. Success like mine requires total commitment, so much so that it takes up my entire life. For the most part, I've had to give up affection and time for the sake of work. In reality though, I have no regrets.

If you had to draw up a balance sheet, what have you missed the most over the past 40 years?
Giving attention to the people around me. I have always loved my work dearly, which in turn has led me to committing to even more work, and with the most blurred of lines between my private life and my business. Once you are a businessman, you never stop being one. If I'm honest, I must admit that I'd have liked to have had a bit more quality time with the people around me; to have enjoyed myself in moments of healthy and simple pleasures. I don't like transgressive behaviour of any kind; I consider infidelity to be too precarious, volatile and dangerous. My work has had an important role in my life, it has been *defined* by it. It hasn't allowed me breaks, but it has nonetheless given me great success. Ultimately, when I'm brought the bill, I can see my life as having been punctuated by the occasional difficult moment, but these have

'10 percent of customers would praise me if I revolutionized my style; the other 90 percent would be left confused. It's the 90 percent that terrify me.'

been set off against the regularity of the wonderful ones.

How do you manage to delegate while maintaining control over your creative and business worlds?
Surrounding myself with the right kind of people in whom I can place the greatest trust. At the same time though, I am still the one who makes the final decisions.

Doesn't it become a bit of an obsession managing a business like yours?
I wouldn't call it an obsession although it is certainly a constant and total commitment. I have to say, it is very rare for me to lose sleep or wake up in the middle of the night because of work. When it happens, it's only for the most serious of reasons.

What is the greatest risk you've faced in growing your business?
Maintaining my independence is a constant risk but it's something I'll never give up. I'm proud to have believed in it so strongly and to have done everything to defend my uniqueness; I'm proud of the fact I've always believed in my approach to fashion, and been faithful to that idea.

How important are the values of consistency and fidelity to you?
They are of fundamental importance whether one is talking of love or work… The things I care for passionately are long-lasting and deep-rooted: consistency has been a thread throughout my life. This is true both in business and on a creative level: the marriages with my production partners and managers are always long-standing, and it's also true at the creative level. I hate this idea currently popular in some areas of fashion where everything has to change every six months; it's futile. I love the idea of having succeeded in making my own aesthetic outlook unforgettable.

What are you most proud of in your career?
There are obviously the times where I have been given recognition; such as the cover of *Time* magazine in 1982 and, more recently, the Giorgio Armani Day[3] in New York in 2013. This served as confirmation that my work has gone in the right direction, and that I have genuinely touched peoples' lives. However, the thing I am most proud of is the fact that over 40 years I have been able to create the complete Armani lifestyle, which mirrors my ideas and can be applied to many sectors beyond the fashion world; such as interior design and hotels. Over all these years I've tried to create atmospheres, going beyond simply clothing: atmospheres to surround people, to bring them into my aesthetic universe, the universe that occupies my mind.

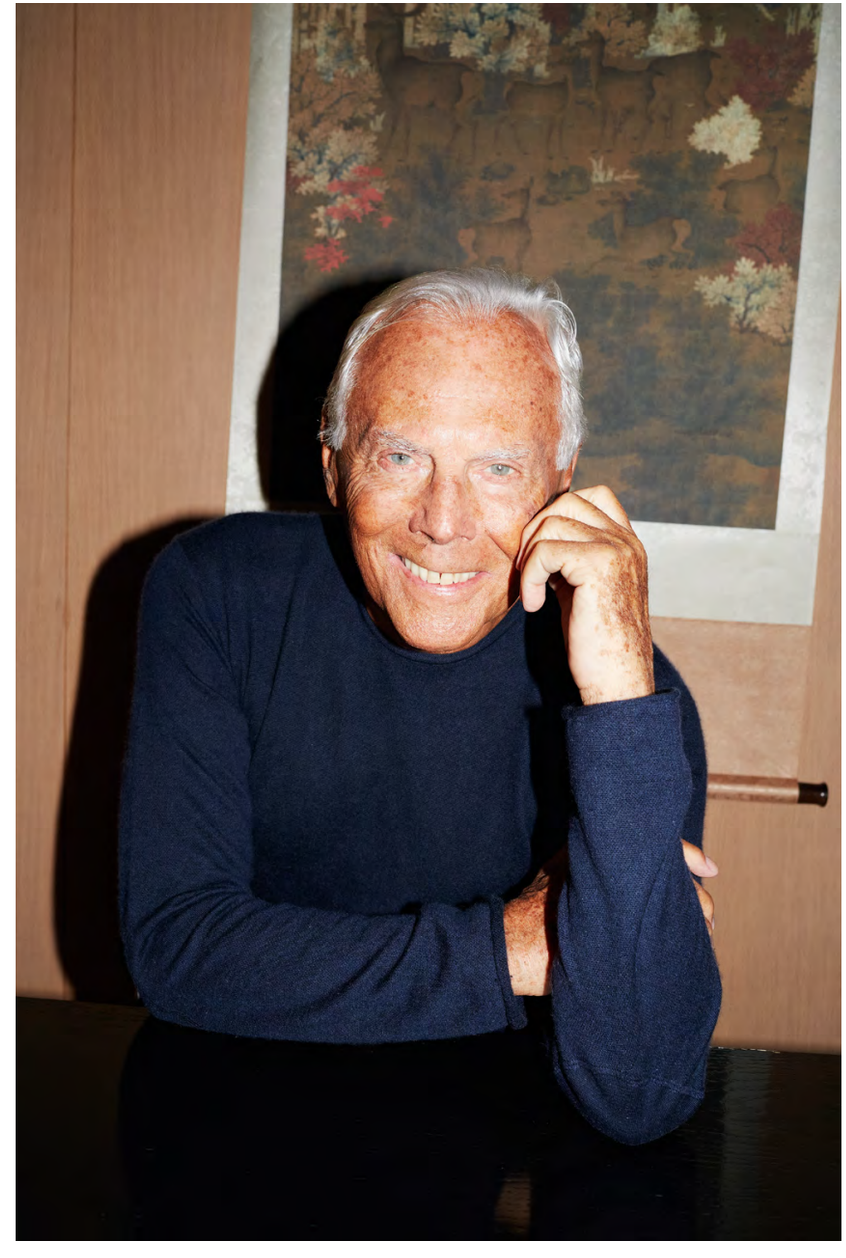
What are your general thoughts on the fashion industry today?
Nowadays finance dominates the fashion industry, and the monopoly of large companies is a clear indication of this. Many historic brands have changed hands and the reasons are different every time: generational hand-downs, conflicts between heirs, divergence of strategies; all of this has led to the absorption of significant brands – Italian above all – into French luxury companies. While these companies have given the brands an international dimension, they've also impoverished our industrial fabric.

'Italian brands being absorbed by French luxury groups has impoverished our industrial fabric. Each time it happens, a piece of Italy goes with it.'

And you never wake in the middle of the night with an idea you have to write down there and then?
No. If inspiration is deep enough it is well-rooted, and it's still there when the morning alarm goes off. I sleep only as much as is absolutely necessary, but it is restorative sleep. As I said before, I'm always awake by seven. I've always got up early – I used to think it was out of duty, but I've discovered it is actually a great pleasure because it follows the natural rhythm of the day.

Have you ever had moments when you have been under great pressure or stress? And how do you deal with this?
I'm responsible for a big business so I'm only too aware of what stress is. Normally though, I find it a positive experience, something that stimulates. What it comes down to is that stress is a challenge; it only becomes negative when you lose control of the situation or when you've been unaware of serious problems. I do my best to avoid both these kinds of situations.

What do you know about the business that you didn't 40 years ago?
I understood from the start that communication is important, but the true basis for success is the authenticity of the product. By product I mean a jacket or pair of jeans just as much as the environment or the service found in my hotels.



Each time this happens, a piece of our country goes with it. Personally, I will never betray the relationship of trust I have with my clientele; because that is my strength and the basis of my style.

How would you define the difference between fashion and luxury?
Luxury is an overused term. I prefer the word authenticity: my creations express the true culture of Italian know-how. Fashion is simply the system which conveys these values.

In terms of business and strategy, what would you say distinguishes fashion from other sectors, such as smartphones, computers or hotels?
Fashion is always based on frivolous yet extremely profound impulses. It is the industry of change and renewal; it promises beauty and makes it a reality, with infinite changes every season. It is a business made from both extreme concreteness and volatility – it is so exciting, a continuous challenge, with parameters which never stay the same.

What do you think of the democratisation of fashion by 'fast fashion' brands?
I believe that fast fashion has brought about a concept of speed and low-cost that has effectively changed the world of clothing. Personally, I thought about this market – which is a very interesting one, not just because of the price points – back in 1991 with the A/X Armani Exchange. It was not a low-cost collection, but a complete fashion line: a total urban look for consumers between the ages of 16 and 25, based on the fast-fashion formula.

Is success measured purely in terms of size and turnover – or are there other, perhaps intangible, values?
No, success is not purely defined by turnover. If I look at all the young designers I have supported over the years by allowing them to exhibit at the Armani Teatro[4]… While they're clearly small by comparison to me, I've been impressed by their ability to create their own niche in the market, and how they've achieved success through great perseverance.

Why have you set up this mentoring project within the Armani Teatro?
Having got to this point in my career, I understood it was vital to give young people — the designers of tomorrow — some help. A designer's job is so tough: every six months, no, every day, you have to question yourself in order to understand whether you're creating the right thing; to understand whether a particular *coup de théâtre* is right. I believe, however, that there is one ultimate secret of thought, of creation, of product — and that is truth.

Are people born designers, or can these skills be acquired over time?
I think you pick up skills with experience, but the initial talent is innate.

Are there other brands or designers that interest you today?
I am interested in authentic businesses, which push forward the values of their respective fields.

Do you agree that today's fashion designers need to become increasingly business-minded? And then, conversely, those working in the business side of the industry must be more sensitive to creativity?
This issue has always been important to me. Our job is one which balances creativity and commerce, because alone each one is crippled. Creativity alone can become an end unto itself, and excessive commerce can lead to [creativity] drying up. Finding a link between the two requires a lot of attention, but above all the will to question yourself – and that's the same for both creative people and business people.

What piece of advice would you give to a young designer?
Remember that a collection is an idea that's grown over six months, and it needs six months of commitment, and of work. From an economic standpoint also remember that, when creating an object, you need to think about its marketability. Also, try and create for tomorrow, because these days things are so unpredictable.

To what extent does human management, of both creative and business staff, take up your time and energy? And in what ways does good people management drive a successful business?
Managing staff takes a lot of my energy, but it is vital. By feeling involved with me, my staff really become part of the company; thus they all work together towards a goal.

Have you ever thought about taking a step back?

'I'm surrounded by very capable colleagues who I've trained with succession in mind. Many of them are, paradoxically, even more 'Armani' than I am.'

Honestly not. My life and my work coincide, so taking a step back is something I've never contemplated.

How much more can your company grow, while maintaining the balance between quality and your values? Can the Armani universe ever get too big?
The constant growth has never involved me turning my back on quality. I have never looked for growth for growth's sake. There is not a size which is too big for the Armani brand, but for me, everything needs to happen in an organic manner.

What maxim has guided the company over the years?
I can sum this up with one word: independence. It is the only value I believe in; it allows me to grow and to express myself authentically.

How do you see the future of the brand?
I have had many different people approach me to propose partnerships… and each time I ask myself one simple thing: 'Is it worth it?' My response has always been guided by one certainty: I don't like being a spectator, or having to accept the thoughts of others.

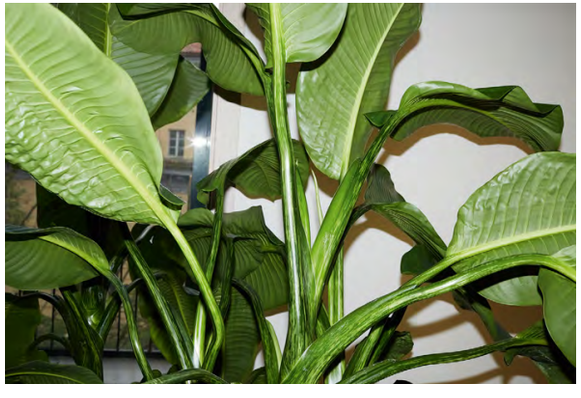
It's very clear that you are an exceptionally organised and disciplined individual – do you have a specific plan in place for how the company will look and operate beyond your lifetime?
Nowadays, I am surrounded by very capable colleagues: people that I have trained and helped grow with succession in mind. In this company there are many people who work with me who are, paradoxically, more 'Armani' than even me. Everything will depend on how they manage the absence of the, let's say, 'genius' – the creator of atmospheres – in keeping the business going. I can, however, assure you that everything is in place for, when the time comes, my team to operate completely independently.

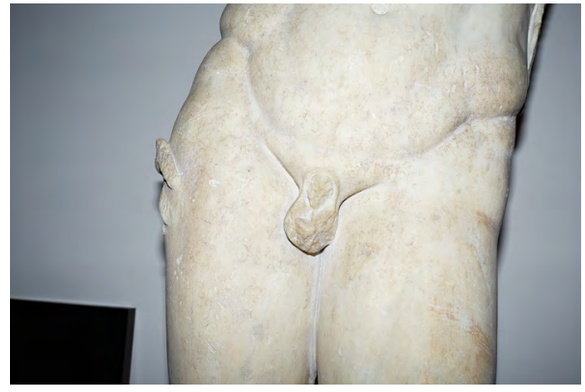
1. The World Fair (also referred to as 'Expo') is a large public exhibition held in varying cities across the world, the first and most famous of which – known as The Great Exhibition – was held in London's Crystal Palace in 1851. Expo 2015 opens in Milan in May under the theme "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life." In conjunction with Expo 2015, Armani will open its own archive and exhibition space, entitled the Armani Silos.

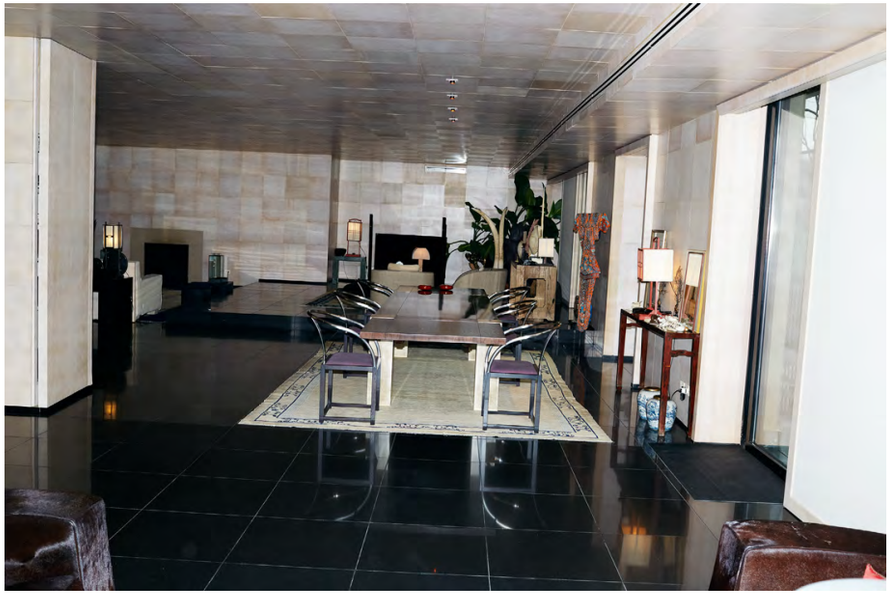
2. Sergio Galeotti (1945-1985) was the co-founder and chairman of Giorgio Armani S.p.A.. He was a menswear buyer before meeting Armani in 1996, at the Italian seaside resort of Forte dei Marmi, after which they become lovers and business partners. Galeotti is often credited with convincing the designer to open his own company in 1975.

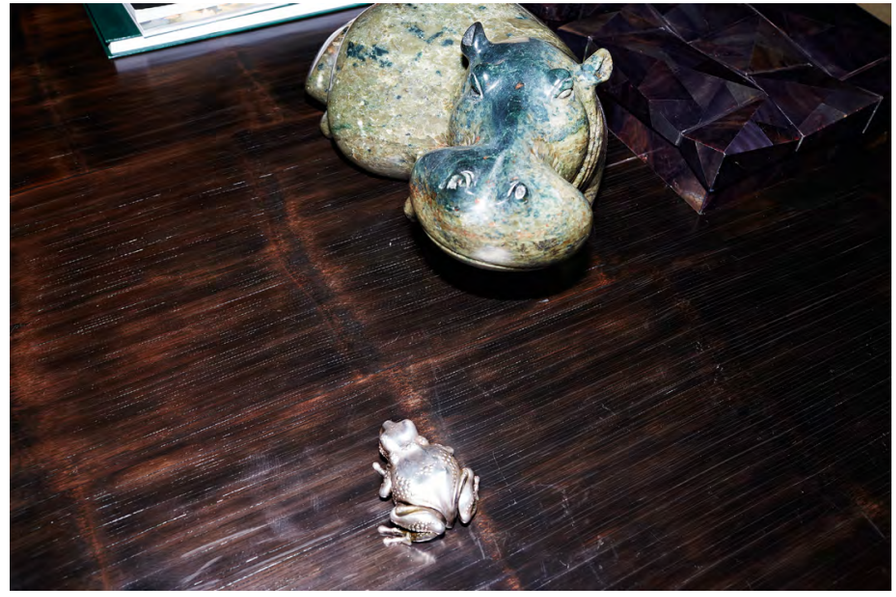
3. In 2013, the Major of New York, Michael Bloomberg declared October 24th 'Giorgio Armani Day' to celebrate the designer's longstanding relationship to the city, and his contribution to its economy.

4. The Armani Teatro is situated on via Bergognone in Milan. A former Nestlé chocolate factory, Armani commissioned the Japanese architect Tadao Ando to convert the industrial building into the Armani headquarters and showspace in 2000.









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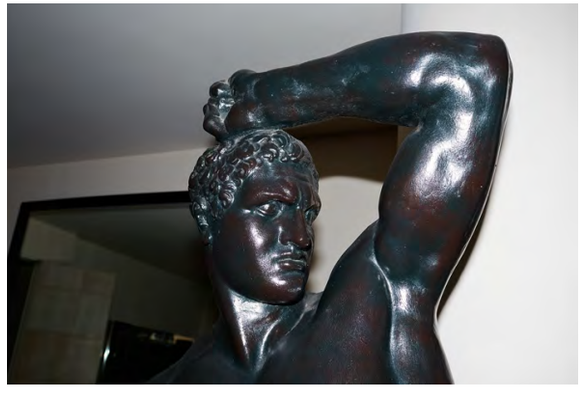
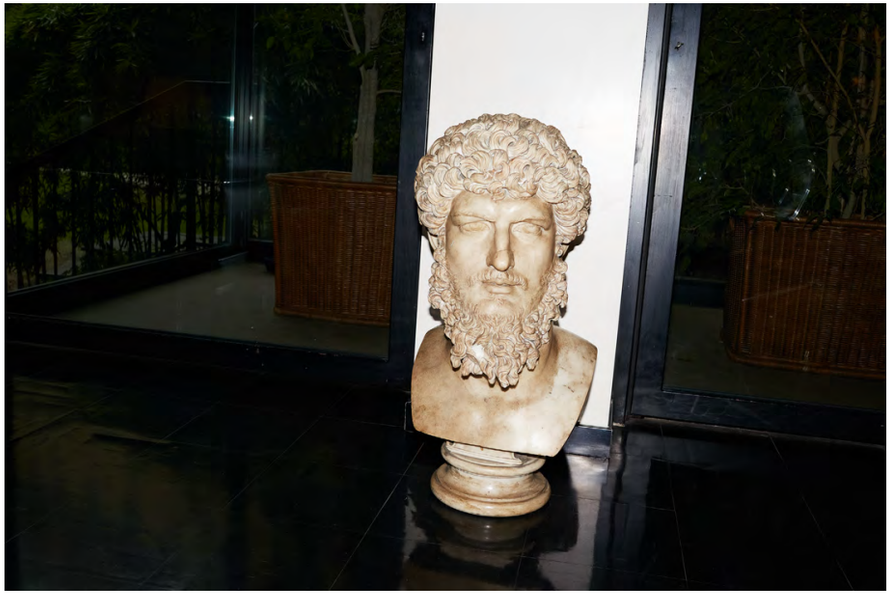
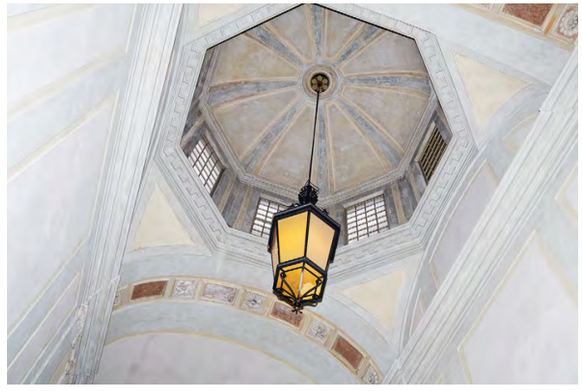




GIORGIO
ARMANI



EA
AJ
MILANO

The dinner of discontent

In China, Uncle Xi's new regime means tycoon spending is over. By Hung Huang. Illustration by François Berthoud.

Couple of days ago, I went to a dinner party full of very prominent people. The CEO of an investment banking firm was hosting, and among the guests was a musician whose music has been played in every single major symphony hall around China, a stealth tycoon who made billions taking Chinese companies public, and a princess whose blood connection is totally communist royalty – I mean, if she were British, you would need to curtsey in front of her.

These kinds of small dinner parties are usually full of merry-making and gossip. There is always some sexual scandal to talk about. Take the tycoon at the table; he is the most illustrious bachelor of Beijing and has been the ruin of many a fashion editor here. Normally he would have some antic about how he narrowly escaped being tied down by an ex-girlfriend, or how he nearly double-booked himself in the same hotel room. But the night we had dinner, the tycoon was not a happy man.

"What the hell are they thinking about?" he demanded. The "they" he was talking about was the Industrial Commerce Alliance, kind of a national rotary club for private Chinese business owners – except in China, the rotary club is financed by the government. "They want me to register all my assets! I mean down to the last penny! That's ridiculous! It is really going too far."

The tycoon was talking about the ongoing anti-graft campaign by Xi Dada [Uncle Xi], the new Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. One of his measures is to request all government officials to register their assets. The tycoon is at the same time an official, albeit a lowly one; but such a title has helped him gain credibility with his local IPO clients.

When Dada first came to power, the tycoon was very happy. He boasted that they came from the same province and their fathers were mildly familiar with each other. He had found pictures of the two families together and had them re-scanned, enlarged and nailed to the wall for everyone to see. At a gathering of princelings, he shook Dada's hand and introduced himself by whispering his childhood nickname. But Dada responded with a confounded look and a rather loud, "Who?"

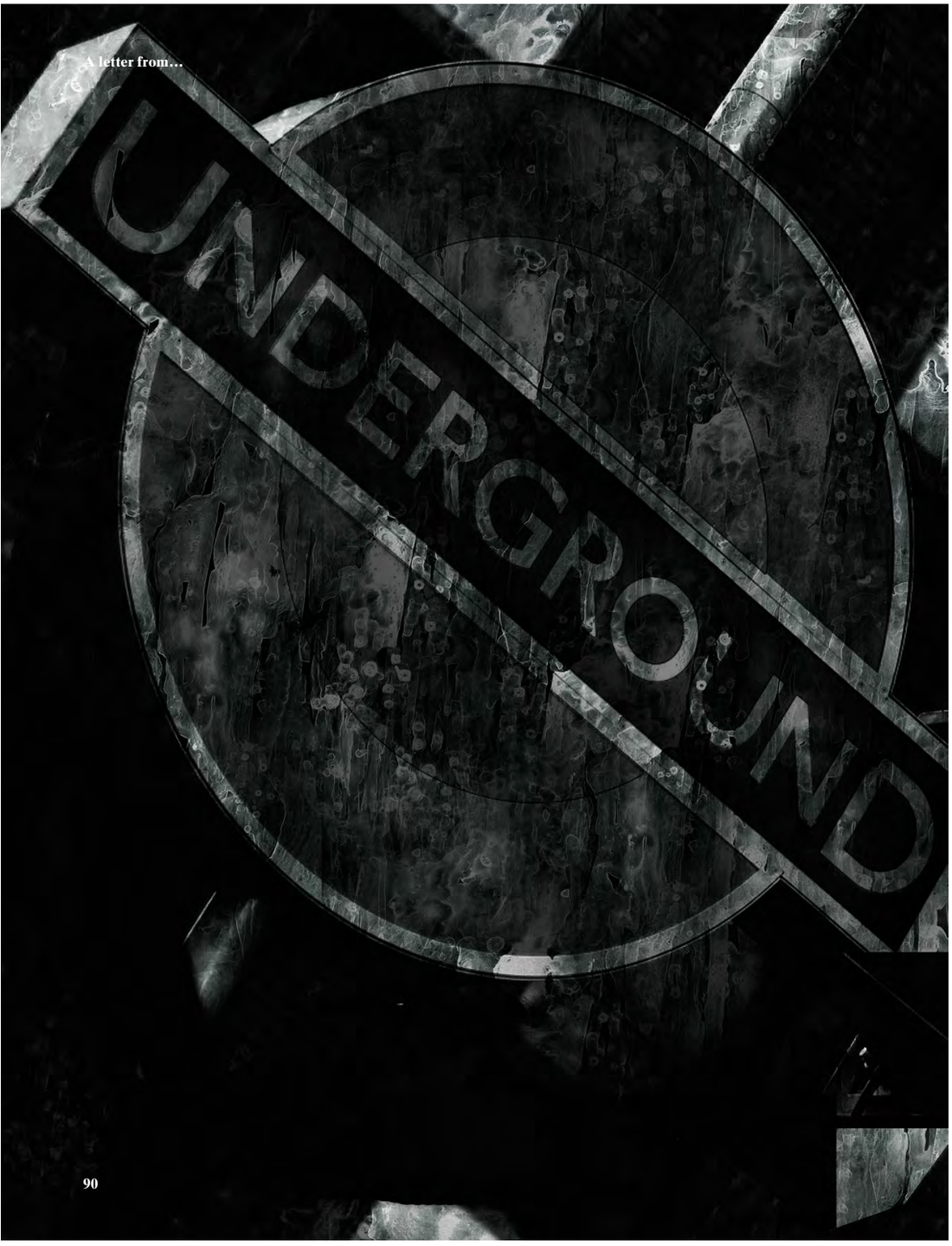
We all laughed at the tycoon's self-deprecating story. So he does not remember you, big deal, we comforted him. "Yeah, but I do care about this registration shit," he said. "Quit," I said. "Why do you need to be a little division chief?" The whole table laughed at me. "You see," replied the tycoon, "this is what American education does to people, it dumbs you down. Actually, it makes you too dumb for China."

"Wait. If I am dumb, explain to me why you need to be a division chief," I asked. "If you don't get it now, don't bother. It's too late anyway. The party is over," he sighed. I vaguely understood what he was taking about: it has been a desperate year for luxury brands in China. The glory days are so over that brands are closing stores instead of opening them. Marketing budgets are being slashed a million different ways, and people are fleeing the industry for other growth opportunities.

"So, do you think the luxury market will bounce back?" I asked the tycoon. "No way. Haven't you heard? This is the new normal. The days of tycoon spending are over," he said. "But what about the new middle class – won't they make up for the drop in sales?" I asked. "Hahaha!" laughed the tycoon. "You cannot do the math, can you? Someone like me can walk into a store and spend a couple of million yuan in one visit; how many middle class consumers will it take to make up that couple of million? And in what period of time?"

The musician also has his woes with Dada's new regime: "They want to know why my wife has Hong Kong status," he complained. "Isn't Hong Kong part of China?" I asked. They said yes. "So why is it different if your wife is Hong Kong or Hunan?!" He replied, "You know what they said; you know what we mean. Fuck that." Part of the anti-graft campaign is to weed out so-called "naked officials" in the system. Naked means their families have all emigrated abroad and taken up citizenship in a country where they are beyond the reach of Chinese authorities.

The musician has a government job as well. Lowly but powerful, he serves on several committees where he can make or break other musicians careers. "So resign." I told him. "Why should I?" he retorted, "I spent my best years building this thing, now I resign?" The investment banker did not comment much, he simply said that he's thinking of doing more writing than business, and maybe moving to Hong Kong because the air is cleaner. The princess smiled and giggled throughout this conversation, cleverly avoiding any comment. She just said she was enjoying her family life.



The visually super literate

Why fashionistas and 15-year-olds all 'like' IDEA Books.
By David Owen. Illustration by François Berthoud.

Instagram is the social medium of choice for the fashion industry. It is also the technology of choice for our company IDEA Books. We were by no means the first to adopt it but when we turned up late, in 2012, we did at least immediately see the potential for what we do. We didn't have to adapt to the technology or the format. Instagram already did what we did — just better.

My partner Angela and I have been sharing images and describing/selling them in the least amount of words since the mid-nineties. It is what we do. When we are in our office with an appointment, we pick up books and open them to certain images that we know just work. These are the images that inspire, and to which people aspire to.

The customers we had before Instagram are the same customers who follow the account now – albeit there are now a lot more of them. Fashion designers, stylists, art directors and photographers didn't have to adapt to the technology either. They were already visually super literate. They always did communicate in images – between each other, as well as to the world at large.

In some ways what is being created now is a new visual currency. Images have a value (numbers of likes/new followers attracted) and can be swapped and traded (regrammed). Having a good eye can now bring popularity, and that in itself has a real value. Of course everyone has the same technology and the same opportunity – whether that makes success more or less likely is hard to say.

If I were 15 now and following the IDEA account, I would be fairly certain that I would see more diverse and remarkable visual references in one day than I would have seen in a year when I was *actually* 15 and growing up in the suburbs. A quick look back at the last 24 hours on IDEA brings up Joseph Tricot with Herb Ritts and Michael Roberts using Greek iconography and jumpers worn as skirts on men; Kate Moss for Margiela in the white collection of 1993; Andreas Gursky's photographs of Prada stores; Diane Keaton's 1980 photobook of hotel interiors; Bill Cunningham's 100 page plus collections specials for *Details*; David Hicks circa 1972; and a lot of River Phoenix books from Japan. That's one day! We can't say what effect this will have on anyone but surely it is a good thing – as it's unlikely the new visually super literate will use their powers for evil doing!

'Everything' as in 'This is everything' is the highest accolade an image can attain. The truth is that the edit is everything. It is a little bit mind-bending, but our collective appreciation of visual culture is actually shaping what that culture is. It is best explained by example. To start with, consider that of the 100,000 plus followers of the IDEA account, 99.9 percent of them will see three pictures of a book on Instagram but not the book itself. The book may have 200 pages of images, but they see three. We always show the cover and two images from inside the book. We choose the images we think will sell the books – these are the images we think are 'the best'. So the edit begins with us.

Of course, if you take Kate Moss as an example, images of her are far too prevalent for us to really shape anyone's understanding of who she is or what she looks like. But take Charlotte Rampling, and it is quite possible that a 15 year-old's idea of her is entirely shaped by our choice of images from her 1987 book *With Compliments*. Obviously, there is a whole world of Charlotte Rampling they can then go and explore for themselves.

However o*ur* edit is not everything. It is influenced by two other factors. Firstly, we sell certain books again and again but don't like to repeat ourselves too much on Instagram, so we vary the selection. And secondly, it is beneficial for us to be popular. The most liked images are the most shared and attract more new followers. So when we vary the selection we respond to the popularity of the images and we will return to those that are most successful. This means that it is not just us that determines which pictures of Charlotte Rampling anyone sees, but it is everyone who determines which pictures of Charlotte Rampling that everyone sees. And that is a weight off our shoulders!

Luxury quantity

Why making higher quality products in fewer numbers makes sense. By Mesh Chhibber. Illustration by François Berthoud.

After over more than 20 years working in fashion communications, first for John Galliano in Paris (1993-2000) and finally with my own agency, I decided to quit PR and launch a label that makes beautiful objects in leather, with my friend Sofie C. Guerrero, a visual artist and dancer. Fashion in Paris in the 1990s marked the tail-end of a culture and scene that began in the '70s with Kenzo, Yves Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld, and continued through the '80s at nightspots like Club Sept and Le Palace and with the designers Claude Montana, Azzedine Alaïa and Thierry Mugler. By the end of the '90s, the creative scene was replaced by a far more business-minded environment, with conglomerates like LVMH, PPR (now Kering) and Richemont being joined by private equity firms in investing in luxury brands.

As the industry became more financially hard-nosed, it focused on marketing and advertising, where once the emphasis had been design and craftsmanship. It's extremely hard to produce beautifully crafted products to meet the demands of an ever-increasing audience: Louis Vuitton now has over 400 stores, compared to two in 1970. Gucci, having experienced strong growth under Domenico De Sole and Tom Ford, now has nearly 300 stores, compared to 78 in 1997. However, ecommerce has created an incredible opportunity: as the luxury industry moves to manufacture in lower wage countries in order to increase their profit margins, a space for small-volume brands that care about design and European craftsmanship has emerged.

Sofie and I spent the first eight months after I left my company slowly travelling around Europe by train – with time being a true luxury – as far afield as Ljubljana, and as close as the Cotswolds in England, looking for small ateliers and individual craftsmen who use traditional leather making techniques. One of the things they had in common is that each individual will make the entirety of our first bag, not just a part before handing it over to another person like on a car factory assembly line – and the individual dedication shows.

The work the artisans do is made to last, and the bags they make will be passed on from one generation to the next – something that cannot be said of luxury bags being made today, even when they cost over £1,000. It's not an issue that these production methods can yield only small volumes for my partner and I. We believe it ensures quality, and our intention is to offer up to four objects a year, each limited to editions of 100. There is little commercial need for vast accessory collections twice a year: brands often refer to the hero bags in their large collections, which makes me question the purpose of the non-hero bags.

Having found skilled craftsmen, we applied the same high standards to the leather. The overwhelming majority of tanneries use the modern chrome tanning method, which is the worst for the environment as chrome is a heavy metal, and during the tanning process forms the carcinogenic compound Chromium VI. We use vegetable tanned leather – a millennia-old process with the least environmental impact – from a Belgium tannery. The vegetable tanned skins come from European cattle farms where the animals are well looked after, which in turn results in skins that are less damaged. Our choice of leather is also aesthetic, as this process shows the skins' grain, pores, folds and sometimes wounds: a metaphor for life and time which contrasts well with the architectural form of our first object.

The decision to launch the label was fuelled partly from being underwhelmed by the hyper-consumerist society that we've become; one reflected in Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*, and its concerns with status, *arrivestes* with fortunes of dubious origin, and obsession with the decadent consumption of luxury goods. We've taken the book's title as our brand name.

These European craftspeople have a knowledge of and a pride in their work that I fear will disappear within two generations. Their skills will be difficult to revive. Wouldn't it be more rewarding to buy fewer goods in the knowledge they are genuinely well-made, using methods that have been honed over centuries and, like a Savile Row suit, be treasured from one generation to the next? Real luxury is being able to travel, to read and reflect, and to design and produce beautiful objects crafted to standards of excellence, without thinking of collection plans and seasonal deadlines. Our first bag is being made by a single artisan living in the Swiss Jura.

Mirror image

by Dick Page

Jamie in yellow, blue and brown, 2015.
I wanted to do something quick and loose that played with the idea of colour, so I shot Jamie Bochert in my apartment using colour-cream prototypes by Shiseido to frame her eyes. She wasn't wearing any foundation, and the blue colour-cream prototype in this portrait is the closest likeness of the blue acrylic sample in the image on the opposite page.

Photographs: Dick Page and James Gibbs. Make-up: Dick Page. Model: Jamie Bochert c/o The Lions N.Y. Shirt by Zero+Maria Cornejo.

Acrylic paint samples, 2008-2014.
In 1997, I began my process of colour creation by painting solid areas of acrylic and watercolour onto sheets of canvas taped onto wooden surfaces. I paint up to twelve panels a day and once I'm done I trim them into squares to use as colour samples. I have hundreds and hundreds of these samples. The ones with a masking tape border are my final selections and will be sent to the Shiseido laboratory in Japan to be transformed into colours and prototypes.

‘We weren’t excited by the catwalks.’

The personal archive of Katy England.

By Jerry Stafford
Photographs by Willy Vanderperre
Styling by Katy England

Jamie wears vintage jacket
by Biba from Katy England
Customized body suit and leather
briefs from Katy England
Vintage Alaia belt from Rellik
Suede platform mule from Guiseppe Zanotti

Jake wears leather jacket,
t-shirt and flares from Katy England
Santiag boots in tan leopard suede
from Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane

Marjan wears leather jacket
by East West Musical
Instruments Co. San Francisco
and dress by Mr. Freedom
both from Katy England

Kate wears leather jacket
by Junya Watanabe Spring/Summer 2005
Tulle coat, Guns and Roses t-shirt
and patched jeans all from Katy England
Vintage Vivienne Westwood shoes from Rellik

Josh wears Runaways t-shirt,
necklace and belt from Katy England
Trousers by Tom Ford
Vintage boots (models own)

Jamie wears embroidered body from Katy England

Jamie wears leather jacket and
embroidered body from Katy England

Marjan wears dress by Mr. Freedom
and vintage t-shirt both from Katy England

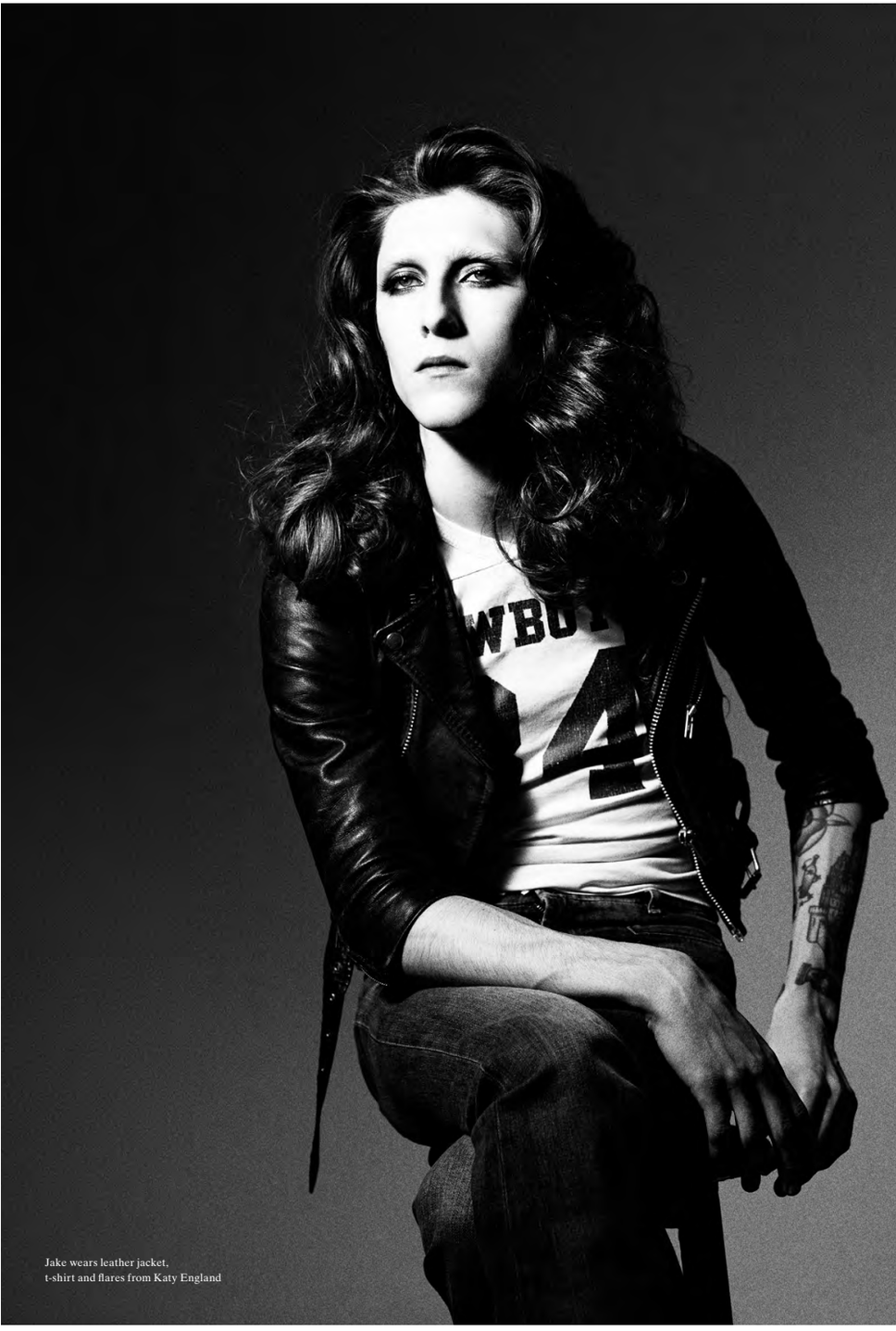
Greta wears
Vivienne Westwood Tits t-shirt
from Katy England

Greta wears Joan Jet t-shirt, vintage dress, jacket by
Comme des Garçons all from Katy England.
Vintage boots from Josh Quinton

Kate wears black sheer dress
from Mairead Lewin
Vintage Corset from Katy England.

Marjan wears teddy boy jacket
and t-shirt from Katy England
Denim cut-offs from Mint Vintage
Lace-up star boots in silver, red and turquoise
from Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane

Reba wears bra top
and Bow Wow Wow t-shirt
both from Katy England



Jake wears leather jacket,
t-shirt and flares from Katy England

Models: Kate Moss, Jamie Bochert, Marjan Jonkman, Josh Quinton, Reba Maybury, Jake L & Greta Varlese. Hair: Malcolm Edwards c/o Art Partner. Make-up: Lynsey Alexander c/o Streeters. Manicure: Lyndsay McIntosh. Photography Assistance: Jared Beck & Robert Willey. Styling Assistance: James Campbell, Cristina Firpo, Philly Piggott. Hair Assistance: Rebekah Calo, Sophie Anderson & Stelios Chondras. Make-up Assistance: Camila Fernandez, Sarah Mieriu. Hadeel El-Tal. Manicure Assistance: Becca Gray. Lighting Tech: Romain Dubus. Digital Tech: Victor Gutierrez. Production by Sylvia Farago. Production Assistants: Raphael Bliss & Lisa Stokland.

Kate wears leather jacket
by Junya Watanabe Spring/Summer 2005
and tulle coat both from Katy England.

Leather biker jacket from Found & Vision
Corset and boots from Katy England
Leather trousers from Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci
Kate wears her own ring

Katy England knows how to work a look. Stylist and creative consultant to Alexander McQueen from his earliest collections until a few years before his untimely death, England now collaborates closely with designer Riccardo Tisci, Creative Director of Givenchy, on both his women's and men's collections. She also continues to work as a freelance fashion editor and consultant to an intimate family of collaborators and friends.

England first met McQueen when she was the fashion editor of London's *Evening Standard* newspaper in 1993, and he had just presented *Taxi Driver*, his first collection after graduating from Central Saint Martins. He saw something in the way she dressed, and asked her to come on board as his stylist, even though she had no previous experience of working with a designer. McQueen was right to follow what he intuitively saw in England – she became his 'second opinion' on every stage of the creative process: the research, the collections and spectacular shows.

System interviewed Katy England the same day London paid homage to McQueen at the opening of *Savage Beauty* – a retrospective of the designer's work at the Victoria and Albert Museum – and the legendary Blitz Kid and Visage singer Steve Strange was mourned at a funeral service in his hometown of Porthcawl, Wales. In some way these two events seemed inextricably linked: celebrating the influential lives of two people whose creativity changed the way their generation considered ideas of gender, beauty and identity. Both McQueen and Strange were born of a particular London street culture: a sexual and social underground whose multi-layered substrata has constantly influenced the regeneration and reinvention of the city and its hybrid self-representation.

And it is exactly this enigmatic, intangible and indefinable quality which England has sourced and explored over the years in her work as a stylist and image-maker. She is constantly cross-referencing the posture and pose of rock iconography, and the sexual and social subversion of the street, reinterpreting fashion's past through its present in order to create a spontaneous, emotional document.

In the shoot for *System*, made in collaboration with photographer Willy Vanderperre, England drew upon her considerable personal archive and sourced clothes from across London's best vintage collections in a response to the city's convulsive urban beauty; to the music, attitude and energy which powers its cultural motor.

'The first shoot I ever did was glam rock, because it was my base level. I grew up in the Seventies and that stuff was all over the bloody telly.'

Jerry Stafford: Congratulations on the Givenchy show! It seemed so controlled and precisely executed – how did you feel about it?

Katy England: I think Riccardo [Tisci] is very mathematical, very logistical and he likes this tight control. He has proven methods of how he likes to approach his looks and his styling, and I've been working with him for about three years now, so I've learnt these and I've got used to his methods. Sometimes I find them a little too controlling and I sort of encourage him to break the rules a bit – because he sets himself the rules. And I sometimes question that and ask; why do we need to do that? It's very clever and he is a very clever guy. I've spoken to people afterwards, to Bobby [Gillespie, England's husband] and Alistair [Mackie, stylist] and friends who watched it, and they've said it was so well executed, and his is a formula that works. But perhaps because this was the first time I've worked with him on womenswear… it was interesting for me as I am more confident at womenswear.

It seemed more like a couture collection than prêt-a-porter …

I love the fact that he can give people both. We want ready-to-wear – I want ready-to-wear – and girls can really wear it, and it's shown in a manner that's cool, easy and wearable. I also think people want the beautiful workmanship and they also want the drama, and he manages both. I think it's good to be like that. Why should they be separate?

So this is the first Givenchy women's collection you've worked on? How does it differ from working on the men's, aside from the fact you are clearly working on a different silhouette?

Givenchy has two completely different production methods, so it's quite complicated. For the menswear, we have a lot more clothes that we style at a later point, whereas the womenswear is designed as outfits from the beginning, so there's a totally different approach to each one. I think Riccardo enjoys the menswear, he has so much fun with it, and it's very true to him – I feel like there's a fun and enjoyment with that.

But for me, it's a little bit harder because I am not a man wearing it, and I think that's the advantage of a woman coming to help a male designer with womenswear, in that we can wear it and say how we feel about wearing it – we have that opinion, and I think that's why we are all doing these jobs!

What is it that draws you to a designer like Tisci? Where do you think his strengths as a designer lie, and what is it about his character as well as his creative acumen that really appeals to you?
I have an attraction to strong women – I think I've just about worked that out now. In all of my work the girl has been quite tough and powerful, and that was something I did at the beginning with Lee [McQueen]. That was my connection with him back then; we liked the same type of girl. And now I'm finding that's the same kind of thing with Riccardo, and so we connect with that.

Do you have similar cultural references in art, music, and photography – or is it more about the woman?
His woman is the Latino woman, and that's quite new for me because that's not been my woman, but I love it. He always, throughout the whole process, wants it to be real and he wants this reality so he doesn't like it to get too theatrical, and I think I like that too. I mean obviously I love the theatrics, but even when I approach an editorial I want it to be desirable to the viewer, I want there to be a thread of something they can take away so it's not just fantasy. I love fantasy, but I feel like I am more drawn to this reality as well.

How did you first meet Riccardo?
Jefferson [Hack] asked him to do a Givenchy special for *Dazed & Confused*, and he said he would do it, but only with me. So I said, 'Okay, let's give it a go'. And we did a great shoot together with [photographer] Matthew Stone, and it was under quite tricky circumstances; it was just before the holidays when everyone disappears. We got on so well, we just clicked and we made some great pictures – and then right after that he just asked if I would do the menswear, and that was the beginning.

You've always been interested in a fashion aesthetic that is cross-pollinated with music, art, subcultures and the street – how does this work with Tisci, who can have a very refined couture aesthetic? Do you help to counterbalance this, or does he already have this more subversive aesthetic embedded within his vision?
I think he already has this subversive aesthetic. He is really aware of the street, you know, for example, the show we just did [Autumn/Winter 2015/16] was all about Latino gang girls. He is amazing at the research – it's from everywhere…

Do you also bring your own research when working with him?
Yeah. With the men's, I'm there from the very beginning; so we go through all the ideas and that's the process I love. It's just so much more satisfying to be involved from the beginning and not just come in five days before the show, but to have been there all of the way, and to have helped on the shoes and so on. He really wants that, he really welcomes it. It's an important thing to have those people around him, and he takes opinions from all of the team. He surrounds himself with really young people as well, and I think he's a very open guy. I think that adds to the strength of the brand.

It's a very different world now working in Paris with Givenchy to when you started at the *Evening Standard* in the 1990s and worked on the early Alexander McQueen shows. What was the first McQueen show you worked on?
It was called *The Birds* and it was in 1994 – we had just met a few months earlier, quite randomly, and he asked if I would style the show. And I had never styled a show before, but we connected and boom – that was the beginning.

How did you function as a team? Where did you find that first common ground – what were those shared interests, where did you go, what did you do together, where did you hang out?
Oh wow. At that time he was so innocent and it was just creatively led; it was never this discussion of production or the worry of selling. It was amazing! It was a total dream world. What did we do? He loved London; it was all very London-based. And where did we go? Um… clubs, London gay clubs really – but we were always milling around bookshops and galleries. I would come in and he would start talking about the collection, and then he'd get bored – *so* easily bored – so it'd be like, let's go shopping! He liked to look round all the designer stores and, you know, I remember him buying me things like a Comme skirt, and a pair of shoes from Vuitton. He'd buy me these amazing things because he wanted to see someone in them. We were both obsessed with Margiela, and we would love to go looking at the all the designer stuff. I think it was just being out there and absorbing stuff on the streets. And he would get so excited when you'd see a great girl walking down the street who looks fierce and has got a major look – we all like that.

Totally. And in your case, music has always been a driving force in how you put clothes together. Was this rock aesthetic already there when you worked with McQueen, or did it develop later as a personal signature?
I think it is something you already have in you. I remember the first shoot I ever did: I was still at the *Evening Standard* but Rankin said, 'Come and do a shoot with me at *Dazed and Confused*'. I really wanted to do that kind of magazine, and he gave me the opportunity. The first shoot I ever did was rock, because it was my base level, let's call it, and it was all about leather. There was this amazing jacket which funnily enough has been copied – it's a very famous jacket by the General Trading Company, a beautiful appliquéd metallic jacket with a bird's head on the collar; very glam rock – Miu Miu once did a whole season on it, and Riccardo actually had it in his references too. And that was my first shoot. You can't get away from it: I grew up in the bloody Seventies and glam rock was on the telly.

In a more general sense, what do you believe the role of the stylist is? What was your role at McQueen? Was it to interpret the work of the designer – to inspire him or her to create in a particular way?
I think we are helping them, essentially. I mean, being a woman is part of the equation: they like looking at the way you wear clothes. I think we just need to inspire them, to come up with suggestions, inspirations, ideas, to be someone to talk to, to bounce with – is one part of the job. But then another part of the job is helping them to edit their own stuff, and as you go through the process to help them edit because there is always too much, too many ideas – and then sort of refine it all. They've got to value and like your taste, otherwise what are we doing?

Going back to the earliest part of McQueen's career – which was missing from the New York retrospective – and will be justly celebrated in *Savage Beauty* here in London: how involved were you when it came to informing the V&A's curators around the early period of McQueen's career?
I wasn't involved in *Savage Beauty* the first time around, at all. It was very close to his death and it was quite strange in that respect; I don't know, a lot of people just felt quite closed and didn't really want to deal with things. So I think it was interpreted at the Met in a very romantic way; obviously the most exceptional pieces, romantic and beautifully crafted pieces were used, because they are so impressive, and that was perhaps the angle there. I know that Sam Gainsbury [of production company Gainsbury & Whiting] and the brand felt that as he's back in London – his hometown – you can't be here and not talk about what he did in London at the very beginning.

How did you work with Claire Wilcox, the curator of the V&A show, on this particular section of the show?
We had to look at what archives were available, because not many pieces had ever been produced, or had been given away to people to wear; to friends, to wear in nightclubs, to models to pay them. Everything disappeared, so it became like, 'Okay, what we can get our hands on?' I actually had quite a bit from that time, myself, but if they did try to exhibit looks from every London show it would be a bit of a jumble. So in the end it was decided: *Highland Rape*, *The Birds*, and *The Hunger* [collections], and unfortunately they're only on ten mannequins. I wish there were more because there is so much more to tell, but with ten you can somehow make a bit of coherence.

It kind of reminds me of the show that Tilda Swinton did with Olivier Saillard in Paris, where she held Napoleon's jacket and smelt it as if to say, 'If only this jacket could talk…'
It's been amazing actually in that respect. Each of the pieces has a story for us – they have huge memories. I did a shoot for *AnOther* with Nick Knight, and I called upon all those colleagues and friends from the early days to get the pieces back from them for the shoot, and it was just like going on that journey again. Before that I wasn't ready to do it, but now I was ready to embrace it, to re-look at it, to remember it all and to

'It's great when you have gay friends who buy you extravagant odd things. Lee [McQueen] bought a Comme skirt just to see how it would look on me.'

'Joan Jett is one of my all-time inspirations. Every time I see pictures of the Runaways, they have that attitude I love – they are just ballsy girls.'

celebrate all the amazing times we had, and to try and enjoy and talk about it, because it's so interesting.

Are there pieces of your own in the show itself?
Yeah, from *The Birds*. He made a lot of plastic stuff for *The Birds*, and it's all really raw, like little t-shirts that were sewn together by himself made from this strange plastic. He always liked really odd materials because he couldn't really afford Italian fabric companies, so he was in Berwick Street finding crap and dyeing, bleaching, and spraying it – that I think is really the London bit. What did I have? A skirt and trousers from *The Birds* show that are [made from]… we called it foil – but they're white cotton 'bumsters', that he put through this foiling process, which is like a black layer of plastic that goes over them and it looks like a print. There's that, and *The Birds* show was all about road kill, so we had the car tyre print.

Let's have a look at the shoot you just did with Willy Vanderperre. Why did you choose a Belgian photographer, rather than someone more associated with London's cultural soil?
Because Willy is hugely fashion, and so knowledgeable about fashion, he is inspiring to work with because he understands all these references. He has been around fashion for like 25 years. I don't know his origins…

He was at the same college…
…as Raf [Simons]. What I like about working with him is that he understands styling so well, and I feel like I've got a bit of a partner.

Is this the first time you and Willy have worked together?
No, we did a couple of great stories for *V* magazine, which went well; and we love working together. I love the way he gets his head around the styling, he doesn't just wait for you to present the look to him and be like, 'Okay, now I'll photograph it'. He is in the styling room and he's enjoying it with you.

Looking at these pictures of Jamie Bochert, please can you give us a bit of the back story to them: what are the references, musical, cultural or street references that you are sourcing there?
I looked at my clothes, my higgledy-piggledy archive, and I thought about the New York Dolls because there's so much of this glam rock in there, and I started thinking, 'Well what have I got and how do I do it?' I just felt that this shoot should be my thing; just trying to get to the essence of my old wardrobe I suppose. I love vintage and am always going round to my little sources in London, and you know, I bought that body suit about seven years ago and it had a beautiful little waistcoat that went with it which Kate Moss once wore on a cover of *Esquire*. And obviously it is tiny, and I could never wear it, but I wanted to put it in a frame I thought was so cute. Anyway, Jamie saw it and was like, 'Wow'. She was so sweet – she was in the middle of the New York shows and she flew herself here for one day and had to leave the same day – and I am just impressed because she is just so tiny, and she fits the clothes I can't fit into anymore [laughs].

For me I am also seeing a bit of Alice Cooper in there…
Oh yeah, that is Alice Cooper. The bow tie actually belongs to Johnny Thunders [from The New York Dolls] – we called her Johnny that day because of it. Bobby [Gillespie] has Johnny Thunders' bow tie. He owns it.

Where is the top from?
It's a little dress and it's from Mr Freedom. It's quite a famous little dress – Alistair Mackie bought it for me. It's great when you have gay friends who want to buy you extravagant odd things.

Was this Mr Freedom dress made in 1973? If so, was it an explicit reference to the iconic Bowie stripe?
It's got the Mr Freedom label from back in the day.

Now let's come to someone who we are both very fond of… Why did you cast Kate Moss in this shoot?
Because of our history, and we have the same style in some respects; we have similar tastes. I tried to go on being true to myself, and she is part of it all.

You have a long-standing relationship with her, and have done many projects with her…
I also know we look good in the same clothes because of the length of our bodies. Her legs are longer and skinnier, but when she did all the fittings, I would fit into all her dresses before knowing that they would be for Kate.

When did you guys first meet?
We probably got really pally when our kids were born and she started her relationship with Jefferson, which is now 13, 14 years ago. I was very close to Jefferson, I grew up with him in the magazine and he was very friendly with Kate, so she got more friendly with me, and then we both had children very close together – and you know that's what happens when you have kids: you want to be with other people who also have kids.

So let's look at the pictures of Kate here, what are these pieces and why these pieces?
You know what, it was very spontaneous this shoot; I didn't plan ahead. I just bought along tonnes and tonnes of stuff that I dug out of my wardrobe I was sort of playing with, and I just wanted it to be spontaneous because I miss that way of working… I bought this Junya Watanabe jacket because I love jackets, like most designers or stylists – that was one that Steven [Phillip] from Rellik showed me and it fitted perfectly. I think I bought that last year; the Victoriana jacket with a tulle coat over it, which you can't see so well. It's lovely, because I think there are two sides to me; I love pink fluffy dresses with roses and tulle. And so I have this collection of romantic, long, tulle-y type things. And this is one of them over the leather jacket – so that is the combination of my taste, let's say with the rock t-shirt underneath.

I was going to come to the t-shirt, a signature aspect of your work – and I think there's a Joan Jett one somewhere in the Givenchy collection.
Joan Jett is one of my all-time great inspirations because I guess it's that tough girl thing. Why that is attractive to me, I just don't know, but she is. The leathers, every time I see pictures of her, the Runaways – they are just ballsy girls and they don't give a shit – they just have that attitude I love.

Tell me about the casting? Were you looking for a particular physiognomy?
Well, the New York Dolls thing: that's why the guys got the make-up, and why I picked little Josh Quentin, the guy with red hair – he is so cute and inspiring, and I know him from around London. He looks like one of the New York Dolls, and he lives his life like that, so I thought I've got to have him. The other boy, Jake, is just quite beautiful and I love a classic man in make-up. I just feel like, boy or girl, it doesn't really matter – It wasn't defined as menswear or womenswear; it is all mixed up.

And just going back to this London thing – what is the obsession with London? Why not further north, places like Manchester, or Liverpool, where there have been other equally influential musical and cultural movements?
Well, I grew up in Manchester and was at Manchester Polytechnic studying fashion there for four years, but it was only in London when I clicked. I came here and thought, 'Okay, this is it, this is my place', and you meet like-minded people and you feel comfortable.

You were saying that you and Kate have very similar tastes in style – she has a long-standing love affair with rock as a style reference as well. Where do your tastes or aesthetics diverge, or are they really that close?
Kate is more classic, I would say, as she is in the public eye and so has to be so aware of what flatters her because she is going to have her bloody picture taken all the time. Whereas I love a more Japanese fit and aesthetic – I don't think she likes that so much. The rock thing is connected, I guess the 1970s connection too; but she goes more feminine than I would. I think we feed off each other like that; we like bits of each other's styles and then we put it together.

You both have musician boyfriends; what is it is that attracts you to that mode of expression?
I am attracted to people who wear their clothes really well, when you see that character and you think, 'Oh my god, they look amazing'. They know their shape, they look confident… I think it's the energy, and the don't-give-a-shit confidence.

Just going back to street style, which has always existed on a social level and was a key fashion influence in the 1970s and '80s – and then it permeated fashion globally with the whole network of magazines. What was your first experience of street or club culture? Where did that first frisson of energy and excitement come from?
Apart from *Top of the Pops*, the very taste was in a small village called Betley near Crewe, where I was brought up – and we'd heard there was this nightclub called the Cheshire Cat on a Sunday,

'I think stylists need to inspire designers. They've got to value your ideas and like your tastes. Otherwise, what are we doing?'

'Kate is more classic – she's in the public eye so has to be aware of what flatters her. Whereas I love a Japanese fit. The rock thing is our connection.'

but it was for youngsters. I think I was 14. So me and my friend, who was also really into fashion, thought to go to this club, and we spent the whole afternoon getting ready. I was into Adam and the Ants, and she was into Toyah Wilcox; and she painted her face like Toyah, and I had tight trousers with a big blouse, and feathers and belts, and it was all a bit Spandau Ballet, Bowie, Adam. So off we went on the bus to this nightclub and we got there, and everyone was like, 'Who are these people? Look at them', and everyone started taking photographs of us. I walked into the club feeling really confident, and I thought, 'Ooh, I love this, this is amazing'. And so that became our thing, it was our regular little haunt, but it wasn't really that inspiring, we were almost the ones that were 'out there'. I think when I went to Manchester Poly, I remember Michael Clark came and did *Performing Clothes*. He was touring and all these kids from London came up, and I met Alix Sharkey from *i-D* magazine, he was the editor at the time. And people looked incredible; it blew my mind.

It's funny you should say that because it's Steve Strange's funeral today, who was one of London's club culture's iconic figures, and he led that whole New Romantic movement which you are alluding to – and its leading players have been reappraised recently, particularly with another exhibition at the V&A last year. And of course some of the other cultural phenomena at that time, like Boy George, Michael Clark, artists and club personalities like Leigh Bowery, didn't view fashion through prisms of gender. How have these kind of figures affected your own creative vision having experienced it personally, at this formative age?

Hugely. I remember the first time I saw Boy George, it was on *Top of the Pops*, and I thought, 'Oh my god! I don't know if it's a man or a woman'. I really didn't know – I don't think it was something I was that bothered about – I just think it was really, really intriguing. And I mean, god, they are like icons really aren't they? I mean, what can I say?

Has their cultural legacy become part of your DNA, and the way you approach styling?

Oh yeah, I did that Michael Clark story once in *AnOther* and that was one of my favourite stories I have ever done. But I have to say, I try to be natural with my approach – I don't like references, but they are there, so I pull the natural ones that are in there and are mine – but I don't really go off on a reference hunt. Maybe that's it; I try to be spontaneous and true because I want it to be personal. Because if I don't do me, then what's the point? You know what I mean?

Moving on to the 1990s, how did they differ from the previous decade?

I know I was starting out trying to produce, trying to be creative in my own little way. I know we weren't excited by the catwalks – it was as if Versace, Mugler, all those labels seemed too far away, and I don't think I could have even laid my hands on those clothes anyway because I was really junior. I never started my approach to a fashion story with the catwalk. I started with what was around me. So I remember working with Phil Poynter and going to a New York hotel called Hotel 17, where all these club kids lived and hung out, and that kind of thing was the inspiration for my story. It wasn't 'Okay, let's look at the runway and they've got x, y, and z'. Never. It was about living it, you were part of it – I was going to clubs, I was doing the door of the *Dazed & Confused* nightclub, so I'd see these great kids. I remember Keith Martin, the model, dyeing his hair leopard print, and putting people from the clubs in shoots because they were on your doorstep, and you didn't have the facilities to be paying models anyway.

Do you think the YBA phenomenon that came to the fore in the 1990s had a big influence on you and the people you worked with then? People like Damien Hirst, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Sam Taylor-Wood…? This was something that hadn't really happened before in London, and it kind of merged intrinsically with the fashion world.

I think we really felt it because it feels to me that *Dazed & Confused*, the artists and Lee McQueen, were all part of the same thing. I remember doing a *Dazed* interview with Lee, and Lee was making clothes for the Chapmans' mannequins – it's incredible, the guys with the cock faces and stuff. And there was one mannequin with all these conjoined bodies and Lee was making 'bumsters' for them, and we took the 'bumsters' – Jake has a film of this – Lee, Jake, Dinos, me, a load of dogs and Lee's dog, went to a wasteland in the East End and filmed the dummy with the 'bumsters' on. And I feel that Lee was one of those artists. All this was going on, and we knew them and just saw them walking down the street; just down Old Street, because it was all happening in Old Street anyway – that was a new area that was coming up away from the city, and all the cool guys were living in warehouses and that was the thing to do. *Dazed & Confused* was there; it was all around.

That was very '90s I think. Going back to something we were talking about: the past and how vintage plays a key role in your approach to styling. Does the term 'vintage' have any significance now that people refer to an outfit from 2010 as vintage? How do you work with vintage clothes?

I'm just so excited by the techniques. [When you look at] clothes that are over 100 years old, it's the technical side which I think, 'Oh my god, look at the embroidery, look at the shape of the sleeve, look at the buttons' – you appreciate it in a very detailed kind of way.

It comes back to the rock t-shirt we touched on earlier, because they are sort of a vintage staple in your aesthetic. Why? Are they like postage stamps, little cultural signifiers, little ways into a particular time or place?

I think since living with Bobby – 15 years or whatever it is – his are very much that; they are memories, like his record collection. And he is a music collector, so that has infiltrated into me through my relationship with him. But the one in the shoot, the Guns N' Roses t-shirt – and this is a point where we differ – is that I really do like AC/DC, Guns N' Roses, Aerosmith.

Without irony?

Yeah, I love them. I've seen AC/DC three times – it's my favourite gig! I'm a real fan; it's the basic core-level rock. When I was at school, on the bus, it was Led-Zep, so it's not pretend. I love it.

Do you see yourself – sorry to use this rather bombastic term – as an iconoclast in terms of the vision you strive to create? Where do you want to take the spectator when you are making fashion images? Is it to question our perception of others, the body, our appearance?

Oh god… I just want to be open. I want to think that anything is possible, you know, voluptuous big girls can look fantastic. Boys wearing women's clothes, girls wearing men's clothes, people that don't have the perfect bodies: I just think that we can do anything, and I don't feel like there are any boundaries. The most difficult shoot I did was the McQueen issue of *Dazed*, the disabled – 'Fashion-able' – issue, with Aimee Mullins. But when we came out of it, one of the girls who was modelling said, 'Oh, I never thought I would look so beautiful'. That was it.

How do you feel when you walk through the *Savage Beauty* show? How do you feel about McQueen being elevated to historical importance in a museum like the V&A?

Kind of mixed because you feel so sad that he is not still here, because if he was we wouldn't be at the V&A – he would probably have done an exhibition, but it would be completely different. So I just feel sadness that he is not here anymore with us. But [also] immensely proud, like, wow this guy achieved all this; and when you see it together it is quite unbelievable. I feel sad I think, yeah…

How have you changed as an artist and collaborator in recent years – what is it that's important for you to express in your work now?

Well the industry has hugely changed, so when we set out twenty years it was purely about creativity – like my beginnings with Lee, my beginnings at these new magazines – we weren't interested in advertising sales or anything, it was purely, purely creative. Now the business has changed and the digital age has changed it. I took a bit of a break and came back, and was like, 'Whoa, what is going on?' It is so different, so businessy and really, I just want to keep trying to hold onto my original creativity. I can't be a fashion editor at a magazine [anymore], because there are all those obligations, and I'm not that kind of girl. If people want me to do a shoot for a magazine like *System* or *AnOther* and they want a little bit of something that I can bring, something that is quite personal and not constrained by the advertisers and isn't the catwalk looks that magazines have to do, then I am really happy to do it.

'I love a classic man in make-up. I just feel like, boy or girl, it doesn't really matter; it's all mushed up. I don't feel like there are any boundaries.'

‘We’re missing neon people!’

For fine jeweller Victoire de Castellane, life is a box of Caran d’Ache.

By Eric Troncy
Portrait by Juergen Teller
Photographs by Antoine Seiter

Above and following pages: sample swatches of laquer colour scales developed exclusively for Victoire de Castellane by her Parisian atelier.

"*I think there is a naïve and widespread misunderstanding about theories of colour. Take the colour circle, or rather the function of the colour circle: it is a purely theoretical concept existing in the mind but not in our actual experience. Nobody can ever paint it out 'correctly' because the moment one tries to visualise what has been proved by optical experiment you get involved with pigment – and all the scientific purity is lost. I could teach the so-called principles of my work to anyone in, say, half an hour, but I doubt if it would be of much use. Because once you get involved with colour reality you are immediately faced with an immense range of variables which govern your vision. These cannot be isolated intellectually without distorting the facts of sight.*"
Bridget Riley

'I knew all the darker colours had to exist as opposites to the light ones. It's like in real life: there are serious people and there are fun people.'

When she revealed this secret in 1978, the British painter Bridget Riley already knew that uninterrupted exploration of colour and its illusions formed the heart of the oeuvre she'd started more than ten years previously. Like her – and others before her – the fine jeweler Victoire de Castellane has no intention of renouncing the frenetic exploration of colour: its deceptions and declensions, its wisdom and scandalous potential. Instead of painting, de Castellane, who is Creative Director of Christian Dior fine jewellery, and has exhibited her *objets d'art* at Gagosian galleries in London and New York, prefers another medium – a combination of precious stones and lacquer – and she's substituted scientific pigment references for the folklore of gem names: kunzite, opal, Paraiba tourmaline, spessartine garnet, andradite and spinel. It's a lexicon whose very utterance whets the appetite of an imagination deeply anchored in childhood memories, faraway impressions and happy accidents.

For those who've developed great expertise in any discipline, theory is nothing but an element among others in the exercising of this discipline. You must know how to trust yourself and oppose a world that seeks to rationalise a state of mind that's necessarily less so. Ultimately this is how it becomes less a question on the theory of colour and Pantone charts, and more about animation and memories of mint and grenadine, of a *perfumier* and a florist. Without these collective experiences, theory isn't worth much and technique lacks that disposition for storytelling, without which, the truth be told, boredom would triumph. Even the most abstract paintings must have a story to tell in order to be unique.

Eric Troncy: Could you start by sharing a colourful childhood memory with me?
Victoire de Castellane: The giant box of Caran D'Ache, with 96 colours…

Easy but acceptable. 96 colours is a lot!
It certainly is!

But oddly I can visualise them too, all those colouring pencils.
That metal box with a photo of the mountains on the lid – probably a Swiss landscape.

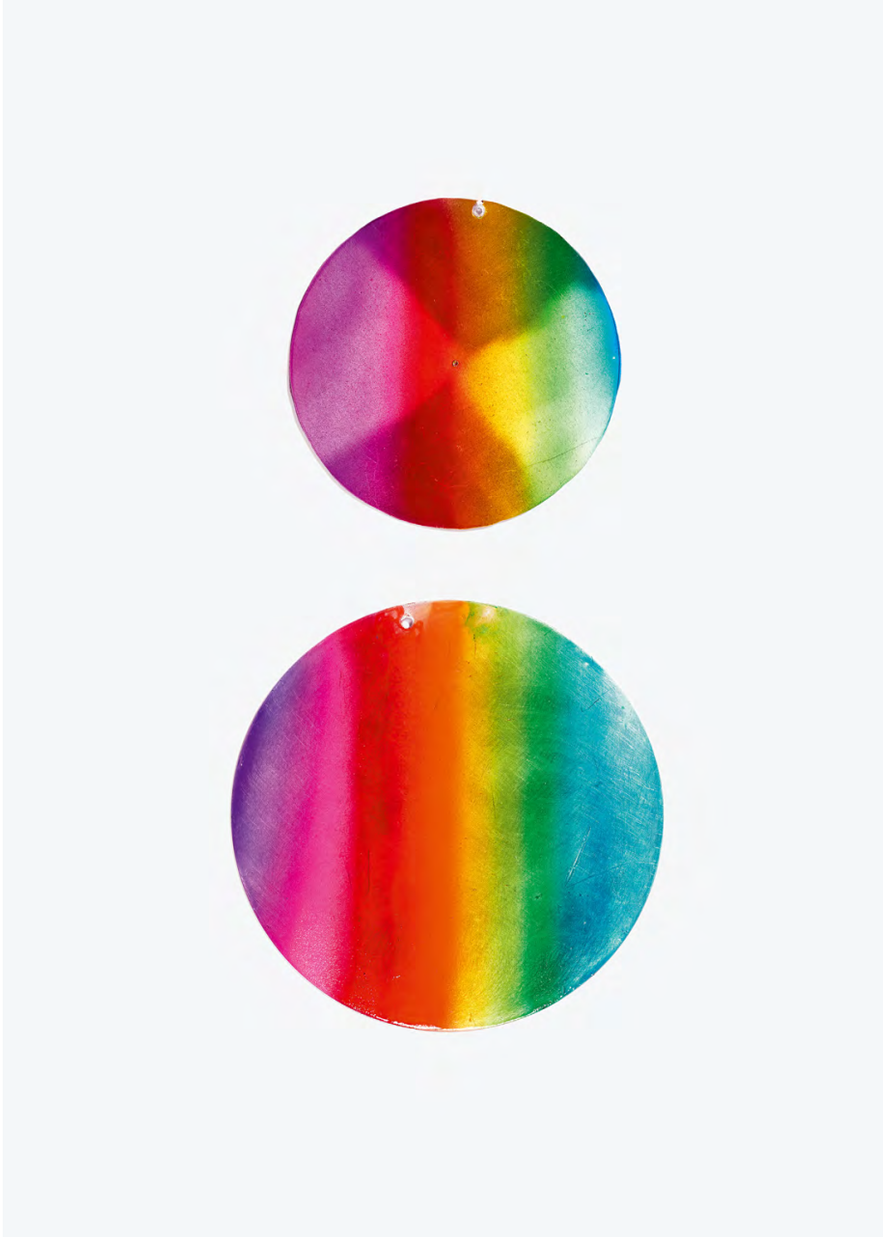
And most of all, the wonderful gradation: the pencils organised by colour, from the lightest to the darkest, from red through to blue…
The gradation! The infinity of possibilities promised by that gradation, the blue, the turquoise, and of course that gesture; pushing on the end of the pencil in the box to lift it and make sure you don't damage the tip.

Did you grow up in Paris, Victoire?
Yes, in Paris. On the Avenue d'Eylau, at Trocadéro, at my grandmother's apartment. I must have been six or seven years old. It was there – I remember it very precisely – that I discovered those Caran d'Ache colouring pencils. I said to myself, 'It's magic, the people who made these must be very kind people.' Then I'd always wonder, 'How could you reproduce that photograph with these pencils?'

But not only did you find these boxes wonderful, you also knew what you wanted to do with them.
Oh yes! It wasn't the object itself, but what could be done with it. There were colours that I didn't like, colours that I found a bit too serious – the browns, tobacco, khaki…

Navy…
Yes and the navy, exactly. All the darker colours in fact, but I knew they had to exist, as opposites. I imagined it was the same thing in real life: in life there are serious people – so hence these serious colours – and then there are fun people; and thus less serious colours. I thought, 'That's what the world is like!'

You're right, the world is like that. I don't need to sketch that out for you!



What were you drawing back then with the colouring pencils?
Landscapes, animals, ladies, dresses… but mainly landscapes I seem to remember. Self-portraits, situations. I loved the Technicolor of Hollywood comedies; that very saturated effect. For me those colours represented a sort of magical, very kindly world.

You mention Hollywood comedies, but I believe you were also touched by animated films. In fact we're both great admirers of *Aglaé et Sidonie*[1], with the pink pig and the bright orange beak of the goose…
The headscarf, the banging doors of the barn, which are brown. And the fox too.

The fox! All those animated films from our childhood – let's not forget *Colargol*! – have something of the Caran d'Ache about them. Measured, well-placed and essential blocks of colours, with rarely any gradation…
Oh yes, I also loved *Hector's House*, *The Magic Roundabout*…

There is a little something of *The Magic Roundabout* in some of the jewellery you created later on…
That's right! Bringing the jewellery to life, giving life to something inanimate.

When you were little, what sort of jewellery did the people around you wear?
Classic colourful jewels, but I thought they were extraordinary. I thought the jewellery was a bit serious but the colours of the stones in the middle absolutely fascinated me. My first memory of jewellery comes from *Titus le petit lion* [a French children's television show], there's a fakir, I think, whose name is "le Grand Yaka", an oriental turbaned prince who wears lots of rings, very big rings, not at all subtle, which are a symbol of power.

Ah, so it's a man who wears rings.
Yes, you know that in these animated films there is always a fakir who wears a big ring with a red stone and I thought it was the most beautiful jewel in the world. It was like a solid pomegranate. And that's also why I liked these jewels: they looked to me like frozen pomegranate or mint water… My relationship to colour developed through my taste buds.

You're right: whether we admit it or not, yellow is obviously lemon!
It can be honey too! But red is, without a doubt, pomegranate. And green, obviously, is mint – it's better than broccoli.

Yes, although for future generations, green could also be kale!
Do you remember Coucoulina[2] ice cream?

Of course! Haven't we already chatted about that before? I don't often get the chance to talk about Coucoulina…
Do you remember how you had to put the bottom of the box in hot water so that the chocolate would melt over the pistachio? That was the trick! Brown over green, and there was also caramel over white.

And actually that's very close to the opals you like so much!
Yes, you're right. All the white opals, absolutely.

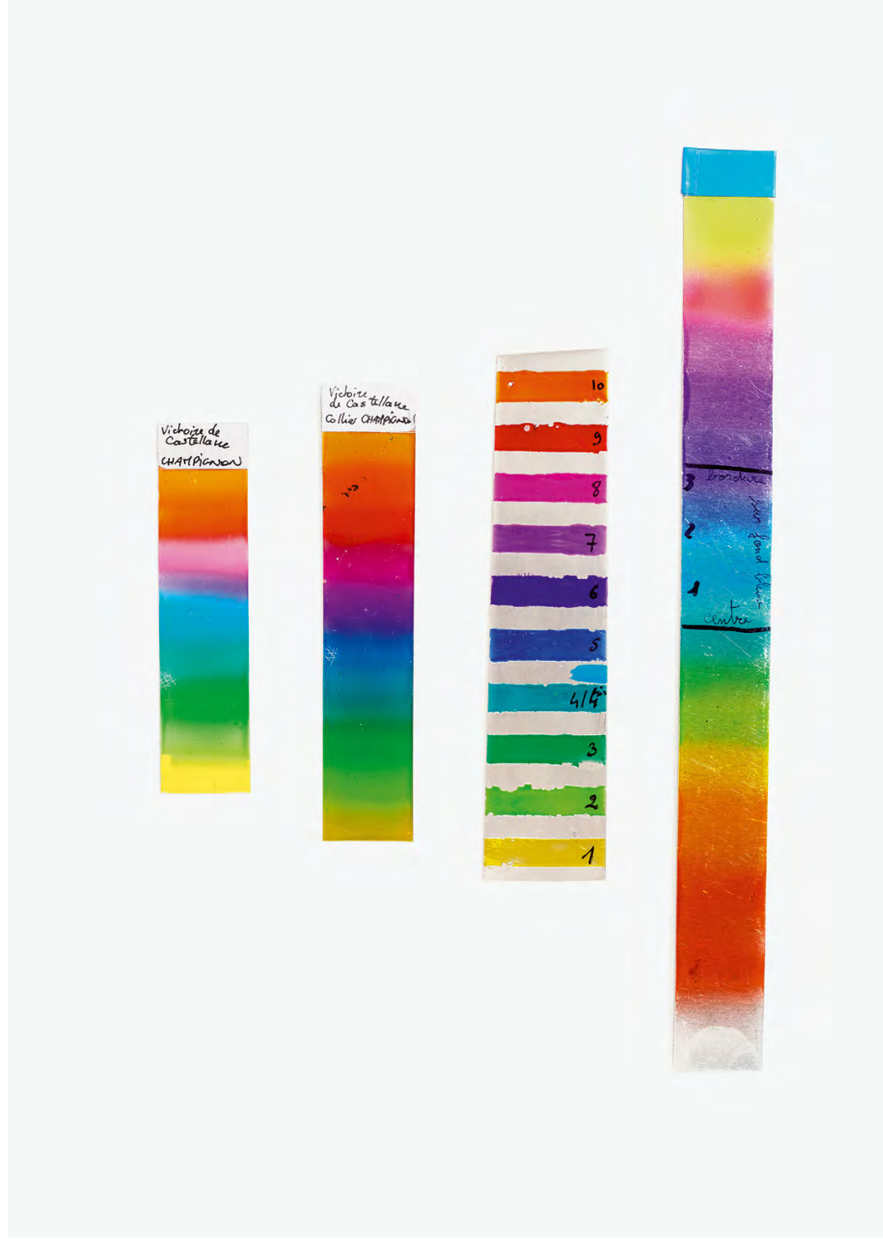
Are the colours of the stones you use today linked to childhood memories, flavours or experiences?
Of course! There's the *L'Oiseau bleu* ring, the sapphire. I had a book of fairy tales by Charles Perrault[3], which was amazing. All of the illustrations were in black-and-white but I'd always imagine them in colour. When I opened the book again a few years later, I was convinced the illustrations were in colour.

Your mind coloured in the film…
You have no idea how depressing I find black-and-white films. Then again, I'm not convinced colouring them at a later date is such a good thing either. They should have been in colour to start with.

'Black and white is good for radio. I prefer to listen in black and white, and watch in colour. You've no idea how depressing I find black-and-white films.'

I'm less enchanted by black-and-white films than those in colour. Black and white is good for radio. I prefer to listen in black and white, and watch in colour.

What about the Sistine Chapel, do you prefer it before or after its restoration? The colours are totally different.
Probably before.

And yet, when you use colours they're far from being as faded as those of the Sistine before restoration.
Yes, but I'm starting something. My starting point is very vibrant, but maybe over time my colours will fade. That is part of life, it doesn't matter, and they won't be colourised later on. Touching them up would be to start from scratch.

You say that, but the chance of a stone